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Giving Dreams an Address

Miramonte Water Polo Marks 50 Years in Lamorinda

... continued from page A1



Back row. Bill Beckett, Ron Rawson, Pete Schnugg, Jim Block, Earnest Figley, Randy Warner, Steve Patching, Dave Kruse, Middle row Dave Olsen, Dan Dupuis, Jon Svendsen, Steve Banker, Tom Beckett, Front row Dave Dupuis, Randy Williams, Tom Miller, Rick O'Hare, Bob Markstein

1967, the first season of water polo. Out of this group came six Division 1 players: Pete Schnugg, Steve Patching, Dave Olsen, Jon Svendsen, Randy Williams, Rich O'Hare
Photo provided

The Miramonte program, called one of the four or five best in the country over the course of its storied existence, began in 1967 when several members of the swim team asked Bill Brown -- a collegiate football and basketball player at Cal Poly -- to coach the team.

Despite knowing nothing about the sport, Brown was a quick study and became one of the most highly recognized coaches in the country. There has been at least one Brown-coached Miramonte water polo player on every Olympic team since 1980, with the exclusion of 1988.

The original 1967 team featured six players who went on to play Division I college water polo. Four of them, including Peter Schnugg ('69), Randy Williams ('70), Jon Svendsen ('71), and Rick O'Hare ('71), played together at Cal under legendary coach Pete Cutino.

When asked how a small public high school could be so successful over such a long period of time, Brown credited a combination of continuity in coaching, parent support, and the recreational swimming program in the Lamorinda area.

"Since the very beginning, we always had alumni coming back to assist with the program," said Brown. "At first, it was out

of necessity. Since I didn't know much about the sport, I'd talk to former players as they went on to college and get some pointers and techniques. Many of them ended up coming back to help coach the high school team."

Currently, assistant coaches Chris Lathrop ('98) Lincoln Halley ('08) and John Nash ('09) are Miramonte graduates helping in the program.

"The parent support has been there from the very start," added Brown. "Their contributions have been simply amazing!"

Brown was instrumental in establishing the girls water polo program in 1995. The year before, however, he invited Heather Petri ('96) to practice with the boys junior varsity team. Petri, who competed in four Olympic Games, credits Coach Brown for much of her success.

After Brown's retirement in 2005, the coaching position fell to Lathrop ('96), a high school All-American and former captain of the Cal team. He currently teaches history at Miramonte. Brown knew Lathrop since he coached him as a five-year-old on the Orinda Country Club recreational swim team.

Considered to be one of the best high school coaches in the country, Lathrop has won eight North Coast Section champion-

ships, his 2008 team was ranked No. 1 in the country, and he also coached the Junior National teams in 2012 and 2013.

Nearly 100 Miramonte players have been named high school All-Americans, 18 have been named to one or more NCAA All-American teams and 19 have played for one or more NCAA championship teams.

Lathrop also credited the team's success with parental involvement, saying, "Even when we play in Southern California we can count on a full rooting section."

"What's also unique is the special connection with the alumni," added Lathrop. "Just this year we've had five former Olympians address the team. This helps connect the current players with the legacy."

The fact that the team has had only two coaches in 50 years, which is unprecedented for any sports team, has given the program stability and continuity that has contributed to their success.

Brown is still active, running the Lamorinda Water Polo Club, helping to perpetuate interest in the sport with local athletes.

Moulton is currently at work on a book chronicling the program's achievements over the past 50 years.



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